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## Support measures for internationalization of European SMEs – a comparative analysis

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**Keywords:** SME, internationalization, supporting enterprises, Small Business Act (SBA)

**Summary.** The article is focused on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) of the European Union that are a potential source of employment and economic growth, often referred to as the “backbone of the European economy”. The aim of the paper is to provide an overview and to critically compare and identify three groups of internationalization measures declared by EU28 member countries within the SBA Policy Measures. Group one consists of positively assessed solutions, group two of potentially good ideas but vaguely planned and group three measures that are rather unlikely to be efficient and successful. The analysis is conducted using the latest available data published by the European Commission.

### Introduction

The internationalization process is of great importance for the economic development of the country and thus for the well-being of its society. The article is focused on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) of the European Union that are a potential source of employment and economic growth, therefore very often referred to as the “backbone of the European economy”. One of the most important frameworks supporting the EU policy on small and medium enterprises development is the Small Business Act for Europe (SBA). It aims at making European SME sector more competitive on a global market. The main priorities set by the SBA are promoting entrepreneurship in general, decreasing the regulatory burden, facilitating the access to financing and market and internationalization.

SBA defines 10 principles, indicating areas on which support for SMEs should be focused (SME Policy Measures 2016–2017 Database):

1. Education and training for entrepreneurship.
2. Efficient bankruptcy procedures and second chance for entrepreneurs.
3. Institutional and regulatory framework for SME policy making.
4. Operational environment for business creation.
5. Support services for SMEs and public procurement.
6. Access to finance for SMEs.
7. Supporting SMEs to benefit from Euro-Mediterranean networks and partnerships.
8. Enterprise skills and innovation.
9. SMEs in a green economy.
10. Internationalization of SMEs.

The following article concentrates on the 10<sup>th</sup> area only, i.e. on internationalization. The aim of the paper is to critically analyze and compare the internationalization measures declared by EU28 member countries. The analysis is conducted using the latest available data published by the European Commission: Database of SBA policy measures 2016–2017, SME Policy database 2017, Country SME key figures 2017, SME Performance Review 2017.

## 1. SMEs in the European Union

SMEs sector, briefly presented in Figures 1–2 below is definitely not to be ignored. In 2016 SMEs accounted for 66.6% of all European jobs and for over EUR 4 trillion value added (at current prices) compared to EUR 7,1 trillion total value added produced by the private, nonfinancial sectors. It is indisputable that further development of European SMEs is beneficial, both for the economy and the society. The question is if and how to support European SMEs in their internationalization efforts in order to do maximize the efficiency of such initiatives.

The twenty-first century has brought a new perspective into the international trade theory, the focus of research has shifted from the country-level to firm-level perspective concentrating on firm-related determinants of trade. This strand of literature was initiated by M. Melitz (2003). It has been proven that the more productive, the older and the bigger (for example in terms of employment) the company is, the more it is inclined to carry out export activity. Foreign ownership and past foreign trade experiences are also relevant to firm's inclination to export. Theoretical assumptions and empirical findings are consistent with the results obtained by Mayer and Ottaviano (2007), authors of "*The Happy Few. Internationalization of European Firms*" report. The very title suggests that exporting companies are rare. Therefore, it seems advisable to support SMEs in a way that enables the development of the above-mentioned firms internal features and not the internationalization idea in general.

In this paper a SME company is defined according to the criteria used by Eurostat – so the employment criterium only. However, full legal SMEs definition is provided in the *Commission Recommendation of 6 May 2003 concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (Recommendation 2003/361/EC)*. According to Article 2 three elements are taken into consideration when determining a category of an enterprise, the staff headcount and financial ceilings, so the level of turnover and the size of the balance sheet. The SMEs comprise three categories: micro, small and medium-sized enterprises that are jointly described as enterprises employing fewer than 250 persons and having an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 43 million. A small enterprise is an enterprise which employs fewer than 50 persons and whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 10 million, a microenterprise employs fewer than 10 persons and its annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 2 million. However, when calculating staff numbers and financial amounts a type of an enterprise is taken into consideration. There are three types of enterprises defined in Article 3 of the Recommendation: an autonomous enterprise, partner enterprises and linked enterprises. Figure 1 presents the structure of SME in the EU by size and by the member country.

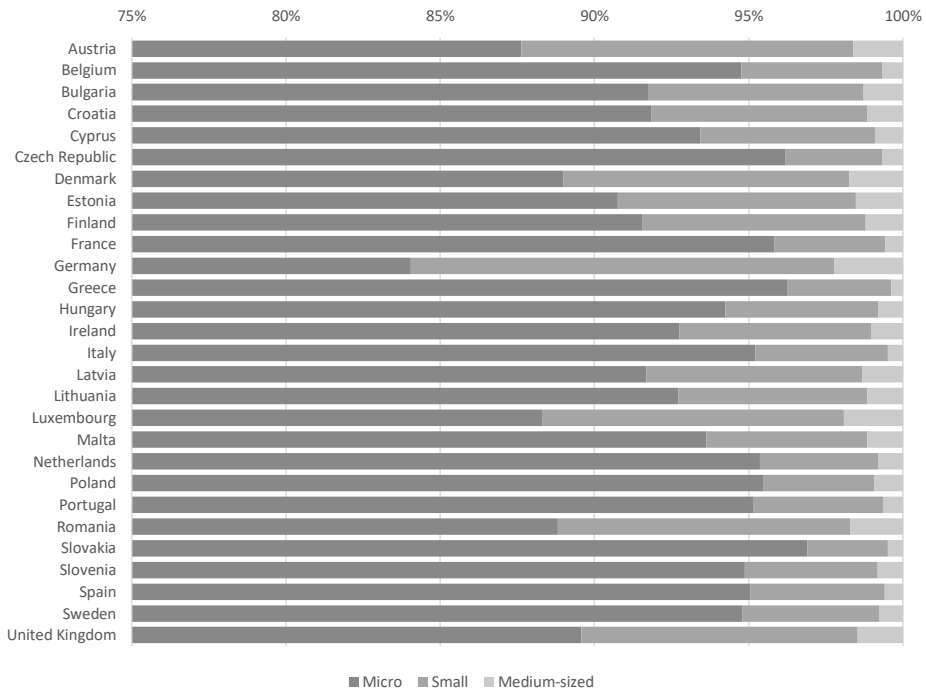


Figure 1. European SMEs in 2016 by size-class and country

Source: own study based on the Eurostat data and Country Key SME Figures 2017.

In 2016 microenterprises accounted for 93% of all enterprises (including the large ones). This form of entrepreneurship is definitely the most common, therefore it is worth pointing out that a vast portion of microenterprises are self-employment projects rather unlikely to go international, so generally they should not be the first in the line for the publicly-financed support dedicated for internationalization. In terms of internationalization, taking the recent research into consideration, countries with a relatively greater share of small and medium enterprises, such as Germany, Austria, Luxembourg, Denmark or Romania, have greater chances of success. The structure of European SMEs is consistent with the number of SMEs *per capita* by country which is depicted in Figure 2 that also indicates the EU average and allows referring the number of SMEs to the size of the country in terms of population. The EU average is 0.054 *per capita*, Austria is characterized by 0.037, Germany by 0.031, Romania by 0.024 and Luxembourg by 0.058, exceeding the average. The Czech Republic, Portugal, Slovakia and Sweden are characterized by visibly higher *per capita* number of SMEs resulting mainly from higher than average share of microenterprises in the SMEs structure.

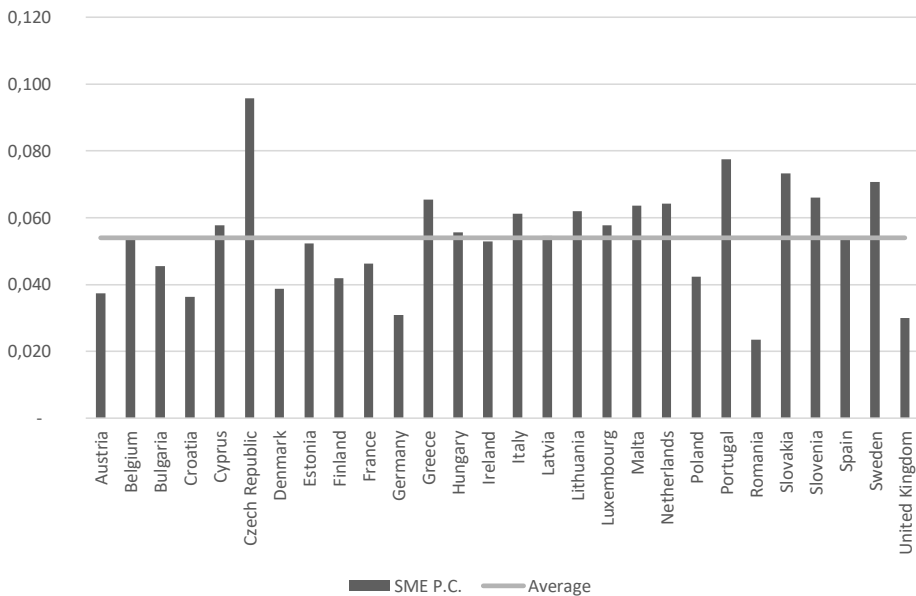


Figure 2. Number of SME *per capita* in the EU by country

Source: own study based on the Eurostat data and SME Performance Review 2017.

## 2. SBA Policy Measure “Internationalization” according to EU28 member countries

The paper analyses the programmes declared in EU28 countries for the years 2016–2017 that fall under “*internationalization*” that is the 10<sup>th</sup> SBA policy measure. Under this measure, each programme is further qualified as one of four SBA policy categories that are designed to meet the needs signaled by the SMEs sector:

1. 10.1 Encouraging coaching of SMEs by large companies in order to bring them to international markets.
2. 10.2 Providing support to SME network-building in accordance with Community State Aid and competition rules.
3. 10.3 Encouraging SMEs to hire or buy in specialist expertise in order to help companies to grow, innovate and go international.
4. 10.4 Other measures.

Additionally, each measure falls under one of the following SBA Policy Categories:

10.1. Market-specific support and business training activities (incentives for participation in networking events, international fairs, market entry studies, marketing, knowledge exchange, export promotion portals).

10.2. Financial instruments for promoting internationalization (loans, guarantees, equity investments in preferential shares, employment subsidies, export credit insurance facilities).

10.3. Measures to encourage coaching of SMEs by large companies in internationalization.

10.4. Other measures (including strategy development, action plans to promote exports, institutional measures such as creating agencies to support foreign trade and foreign direct investments) (SME Policy Measures 2016–2017 Database).

In the next step, the programmes were subjected to an assessment in terms of validity, clarity and purpose. By validity it is understood whether the proposed actions are consistent with the implications of the newest empirical research on internationalization of SMEs. Clarity refers to the description of a given programme and the information provided, whereas the purpose to the relevance of the targets set. Those three elements allowed the author to propose three groups and then attribute each programme to one of the following: group one consisting of positively perceived initiatives presenting a clear vision of encouraging and supporting internationalization, group two consisting of potentially good but vaguely described ideas and group three = measures that are rather unlikely to be efficient and successful in terms of internationalization despite being consistent with the EU guidelines. Group I consists of measures planned by Austria, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Spain and the Netherlands. Group II encompasses initiatives undertaken by Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK. Group III includes Bulgarian, Romanian, Spanish, Czech, Cypriot and Maltese solutions. In some cases, the country’s measures are attributed to

more than one group. Overall, most frequently, the proposed programmes were attributed to 10.4 (other measures) category. Six countries declared SBA 10.2 (support to networking) category, two countries – 10.1 (coaching of SMEs by large companies) and two countries – 10.3 (hiring specialists). In terms of SBA Policy Category, the most common were 10.1 (training activities) and 10.2 (financial instruments for promoting internationalization). The overview of the measures is prepared based on the SME policy measures 2016–2017 database which allows browsing the initiatives by country, measure and category.

## GROUP I

One of the best targeted and focused measures is the German **Improvement of export credit guarantees**. Its general aim is to increase the exports of SMEs by providing protection against bad debt losses in connection with supplies to difficult and risky markets. Similarly, **FINEXPO – New instrument for Belgian export aid (FED)** grants support to companies and/or banks for credits to export capital goods and related services. It also improves the conditions of credit financing by either reducing or stabilizing the cost of financing provided by the banks. Another financial measure is the **Export Finance Scheme to Support Irish Exporting SMEs** which is addressed to Irish exporting SMEs and provides the government-backed financial support needed to access foreign markets. A Draft Regulation of **Rules of Issuing Medium and Long-Term Export Credit Guarantees and Investment Guarantees to Enterprises and the Agricultural Co-Operative** is an initiative that meets specific needs of Latvian exporters. An export credit guarantee provides up to 95% risk coverage concerning commercial risk and up to 100% risk coverage concerning political risk of the total sum of an export transaction. Italian **Financial incentives to support feasibility studies and technical assistance programmes of investments in non-EU countries** are a very capacious initiative of a different kind. They are to financially support investments of Italian companies in non-EU countries, as well as provide subsidised loans. The funding covers 100 % of total expenses up to EUR 150 000 for studies for commercialization investments, EUR 300 000 for studies for production investments, and EUR 300 000 for the technical assistance.

**Luxembourg Nation Branding** programme is an initiative aiming at promoting the country's image and therefore supporting its international relations, and attracting investors/professionals/visitors - all within the nation branding initiative that was initiated in 2013. It is clearly stated that this programme is not exclusively focused on SMEs. Although this is a country level programme, in author's view, it is consistent with the level of advancement of SMEs in Luxembourg.

Austria offers **AWS Kit4Market** – a subsidy of up to EUR 100 000 for up to 12 months. It is to enhance international market opportunities for Austrian technology providers, *inter alia*, in order to support studies that can demonstrate additional value of Austrian technologies for customers in a specific target country. The measure itself is a bit

vague but is concentrated on a specific sector and dedicated to a specific country. Maltese **SME e-Commerce Grant Scheme** provides grants up to EUR 5 000 with a maximum aid intensity of 50% for the design, development, implementation and delivery of online products such as websites or mobile apps.

One of the Spanish initiatives is **ICO International Line for 2017** which is a measure being addressed to self-employed workers and Spanish private and public entities as well as entities intended for cash needs for payroll costs, suppliers' settlements, productive investments abroad, productive assets, business acquisition and setting-up of companies abroad. It also encompasses financial support dedicated to companies selling or purchasing goods and services with delayed payment to or from foreign companies.

The most interesting and simultaneously the least general support measures in EU28 is **Information Desk about the Brexit** offered in the Netherlands. It is to provide information and answer questions about the influence of Brexit on Dutch business. This programme is tailor-made clearly focused on Dutch main trading partner and possible negative consequences of Brexit for SMEs.

## GROUP II

This group consists of relatively specific initiatives indicating a particular area that needs support. Croatian **Amendments to the Act on Free Zones** are to ensure full compliance of the law with the EU *acquis* and national legislation that directly affects business environment within the free zones. Greek **Extroversion - Internationalization of SMEs. Programme integrated in the Operational Programme Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship & Innovation – EPAnEK – 2014–2020** financially supports manufacturing SMEs and focuses on 8 priority sectors of EPAnEK (excluding tourism). It is to encourage collaborative schemes and participation in value chains. Funding ranges from EUR 30 000 to EUR 250 000.

Lithuanian **Business Cluster LT** provides financial support for clusters or SME groups for participation in international networks, for experts personnel and travel costs, acquisition of necessary research and analytical work and marketing expenses dedicated to increasing the visibility of the cluster enterprises products. Hungarian **Developing of ICT companies for expansion to international markets** is a measure focusing on establishing expert and mentor networks to facilitate ICT start-up companies to enter into international markets and on the promotion of products and services developed by those companies. **EDIOP 3.1.2** programme helps digital enterprises in financing various costs, like advertising or participation in international events and expos.

Polish **Go To Brand programme** provides support for entrepreneurs participating in the sectoral and general promotion programmes. SMEs are offered tailor-made tools to obtain support for internationalization. The United Kingdom offers a **Find a Supplier Tool** which is an online resource providing a directory of potential UK trade partners from all sectors, it is to break down barriers to overseas trading.

Spanish **ICEX Spain Tech Centre** is a two-week programme of ‘in-the-field’ intensive training with conferences, meetings, activities introducing to the business culture of Silicon Valley. The programme supports internationalization of Spanish tech start-ups into the US market and Silicon Valley in particular.

In Sweden 6 **Regional export centres** were established in: Skåne, Kronoberg, Östergötland, Västra Götaland, Dalarna and Västerbotten. This measure is consistent with the Swedish 2015 Export Strategy and is designed for SMEs that need some export advice.

### GROUP III

Those initiatives are likely to positively improve the condition of SMEs in a given country but not necessarily in terms of internationalization. Bulgarian **Creating conditions for sustainable development and successful integration of Bulgarian enterprises on European and international markets by supporting participation in international fairs and conferences** although somehow supports internationalization of SME, it does so very indirectly. Participation in international fairs and conferences is of great importance but rather as a complementary action. Similarly – Romanian **Program to support the internationalization of Romanian companies**. It consists of financial support up to approx. EUR 11 000 in a year for activities such as: participation in international fairs, exhibitions and economic missions; development of mobile applications in Romanian and at least one foreign language; creation of the visual identity of a company (brand, logo) or training for SMEs’ representatives in promotion and presentation techniques. This measure encompasses many elements from different entrepreneurial areas.

Czech Projects **NOVUMM & NOVUMM KET & DESIGN** also provide financial support for participation in foreign exhibitions and fairs. A substantial advantage of this measure over Bulgarian or Romanian solutions is that offered support must concern priority sectors of the Czech industry (NOVUMM) and key enabling technologies (NOVUMM KET). Further, Spanish ICEX-NEXT programme is to support internationalization of non-exporting or not consolidated exporting Spanish SMEs through counselling internationalization-related expense support.

Maltese **SME Internationalization Grant Scheme** grants financial support up to 50% and EUR 10 000 for participation in overseas international business promotion fairs. Costs that might be covered include: participation fees, rental of exhibition space, stand and travel costs for 2 individuals. The last programme included in this group is the Cypriot **Participation in International networking events** that is mainly addressed to research and academic institutions and SMEs having their headquarters in Cyprus. This initiative focuses on networking and provides single, fixed funding amount of EUR 900 for each participant.

There are also countries for which there were no direct internationalization measures declared. Those countries are Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Portugal, Slovakia



and Slovenia. It means only that internationalization was no primary measure, it could, however, be secondary. Moreover, internationalization agenda can be performed by other SBA Policy Measures, for example by access to finance or enterprise skills & innovation. The expanded description of the analyzed programmes is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Programme Description

1	Programme description 2
Austria	<p><b>AWS Kit4Market</b> Provides a subsidy of up to EUR 100,000 for up to 12 months. Its aim is to enhance international market opportunities for Austrian technology providers. It is to support studies that can demonstrate the additional value of Austrian technologies for customers in a specific target country</p>
Belgium	<p><b>FINEXPO – New instrument for Belgian export aid (FED)</b> It offers financial support for internationalization by granting public support to companies and/or banks for credits to export capital goods and related services. The programme is designed for all companies, including SMEs. It also improves the conditions of credit financing for the supply of equipment and services: it either reduces or stabilizes the cost of financing provided by the banks</p>
Bulgaria	<p><b>Creating conditions for sustainable development and successful integration of Bulgarian enterprises on European and international markets by supporting participation in international fairs and conferences.</b> It supports internationalization of SME and creates conditions for sustainable development and the successful integration of Bulgarian enterprises into European and international markets, simultaneously enhancing the competitiveness of Bulgarian SMEs</p>
Croatia	<p><b>Amendments to the Act on Free Zones</b> It is to ensure full compliance of the law with the EU acquis and national legislation that directly affects business environment within the free zones. It should improve the operation of free zones even after the expiry of the transition period „phasing out” related to the use of tax benefits within the free zones in Croatia. Free zones have the potential to improve SMEs’ growth, especially in the export-oriented manufacturing and services sector as well as in R&amp;D intensive operations</p>
Cyprus	<p><b>Participation in International networking events</b> It is mainly addressed to research and academic institutions and SMEs which have their headquarters in Cyprus and wish to participate in international networking events on research. The objective is to encourage participation of Cypriot Organizations in international networking events with single funding amount of €900 (lump sum) for each participant. This amount will be fixed and will be paid regardless of the applicant costs. Its scope is limited to research and academic institutions and SMEs which have their headquarters in Cyprus</p>
The Czech Republic	<p><b>Projects NOVUMM &amp; NOVUMM KET &amp; DESIGN</b> Provide support in the form of subsidized services to the participation of SMEs in foreign exhibitions and fairs focusing on priority sectors of the Czech industry (NOVUMM) and for the field of key enabling technologies (NOVUMM KET). The main objective of this measure is to increase internationalization of Czech SMEs and promote their export possibilities</p>
Germany	<p><b>Improvement of export credit guarantees (Exportkreditbürgschaften - Hermes)</b> The general aim of this measure is to increase the exports of SMEs and open difficult markets to them. The main purpose of Hermes Cover is to provide protection against bad debt losses in connection with supplies to difficult and risky markets. It concerns the coverage of higher shares of foreign deliveries, i.e. German deliveries containing substantial shares of imported vendor parts from abroad have become eligible for export credit guarantees. Until the end of 2019, the uninsured portion can be reduced upon application to 5 % against the payment of a premium surcharge</p>

1	2
Greece	<p><b>Extroversion - Internationalization of SMEs. Programme integrated in the Operational Programme Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship &amp; Innovation– EPAnEK -2014-2020</b> It supports manufacturing SMEs with a focus on the 8 priority sectors of EPAnEK (excluding tourism) and aims at improving competitiveness in international markets. It is to encourage collaborative schemes and participation in value chains. Proposals are funded from EUR 30,000 to EUR 250,000</p>
Hungary	<p><b>Developing of ICT companies for expansion to international markets</b> The measure contains two parts. The first part focuses on establishing expert and mentor networks to facilitate ICT start-up companies to enter into international markets. The second part targets the promotion of product and services marketization developed by ICT companies by combined credit tools. EDIOP 3.1.2 programme aims to help digital enterprises in financing (with combined non-repayable aid loan) costs of software localization, market specific activities, advertising, as well as participation in international events and expos</p>
Ireland	<p><b>Export Finance Scheme to Support Irish Exporting SMEs</b> This Export Finance Initiative aims at rolling out a new scheme to provide Irish export orientated SMEs with the support they need to access foreign markets and grow their business internationally. It is addressed to Irish exporting SMEs</p>
Italy	<p><b>Financial incentives to support feasibility studies and technical assistance programmes of investments in non-EU countries</b> The measure is to financially support investments of Italian companies in non-EU countries. It provides subsidised loans for feasibility studies for commercialization and production investments and for technical assistance and training of personnel involved in investment projects abroad. The funding covers 100 % of total expenses up to EUR 150 000 for studies for commercialization investments, EUR 300 000 for studies for production investments, and EUR 300 000 for technical assistance. The measure envisages support to exporting SMEs for internationalization processes (capitalization of exporting SMEs with funds up to EUR 400 000) and support for promotional activities and participations to fairs and missions (with funds up to EUR 100 000)</p>
Latvia	<p><b>Draft Regulation “Rules of Issuing Medium and Long-Term Export Credit Guarantees and Investment Guarantees to Enterprises and the Agricultural Co-Operative”</b> An export credit guarantee provides up to 95% risk coverage concerning commercial risk and up to 100% risk coverage concerning political risk, of the total sum of an export transaction. The maximum amount of an export credit guarantee or the maximum amount of ALTUM obligations for losses that have incurred due to non-payment by one foreign customer is up to EUR 5 million. The amount of investment guaranteed to an economic operator investing in one foreign capital company cannot exceed EUR 2,5 million. The Investment guarantee will cover the losses of the guarantee holder up to 100% if they were incurred while making investments abroad</p>
Lithuania	<p><b>Business Cluster LT</b> It provides financial support for clusters or SME groups to engage in international activities. Eligible expenses include participation fees in international networks (platforms); experts personnel and travel costs; acquisition of research and analytical work necessary for the project implementation; marketing expenses targeted at increasing the visibility of the products/services of the cluster enterprises, etc.</p>
Luxembourg	<p><b>Luxembourg Nation Branding</b> The initiative aims at promoting the country’s image and thus supports its international relations, attracts investors/professionals/visitors, and ensures coherent engagement with other countries. It is the final phase of the nation branding initiative which was initially started in 2013 and will now actively promote the country’s new image. This initiative does not exclusively focus on SMEs, but the promotion of the country’s new image will directly affect the image of Luxembourgish SMEs as well</p>

1	2
Malta	<p><b>SME Internationalization Grant Scheme</b> The scheme provides grants primarily for participation in overseas international business promotion fairs. Eligible costs include participation fees, rental of exhibition space, setting up a stand and travel costs for 2 individuals. The maximum grant value is EUR 10,000. The maximum aid intensity is 50%</p> <p><b>SME e-Commerce Grant Scheme</b> The scheme provides grants for the design, development, implementation and delivery of online sales/booking facilities, both websites and mobile apps are eligible. The maximum grant value is EUR 5,000. The maximum aid intensity is 50%</p>
The Netherlands	<p><b>Information Desk about the Brexit</b> It is to provide information about the impact of the Brexit on business and to support entrepreneurs who have questions about the consequences of a departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union. Desk's role is also to hear the ideas and suggestions so that the government can get to work on these questions/areas. A separate page on the central government website has been created with general information about the Brexit</p>
Poland	<p><b>Go to Brand</b> It provides support for entrepreneurs participating in the sectoral promotion programmes and general promotion programmes. The measure aims at the promotion of Polish brands with the involvement of SMEs. Enterprises can use various tailor-made tools to obtain support for internationalization</p>
Romania	<p><b>Program to support the internationalization of Romanian companies</b> The measure consists of financial support (competition based - calls for proposals) in order to enhance the internationalization of SMEs. Each beneficiary can get up to approx. EUR 11,000 in a year, non-refundable. A maximum of 500 beneficiaries annually are estimated. It will finance activities such as: participation at fairs and exhibitions organized abroad, participation in economic missions, development of company sites for mobile applications in Romanian and at least one foreign language, creation of the visual identity of a company (brand, logo), training for SMEs' representatives in promotion and presentation techniques</p>
Spain	<p><b>ICEX Spain Tech Centre</b> A two-week programme to get introduced to the business culture of Silicon Valley through 'in-the-field' intensive training with conferences, meetings, activities. The programme offers permanent assistance to adapt business models to the US market. It aims to support the internationalization activities of Spain tech start-ups and the landing process in Silicon Valley and on the US market</p> <p><b>ICO International line for 2017</b> The measure is structured in two „Tranches”. Tranche I: is addressed to self-employed workers and Spanish private and public entities. The types of aids included are: cash needs for payroll, costs, suppliers' settlements, productive investments abroad: productive assets, business acquisition, setting-up of companies abroad. Tranche II encompasses financial aid addressed to the following eligible applicants: (i) Companies with legal domicile in Spain and which sell goods and services with delayed payment to companies abroad.(ii) Companies with legal domicile located abroad and that purchase goods or services with delayed payment from companies with their legal domicile in Spain</p>
Sweden	<p><b>Regional export centres</b> Establishing 6 regional export centres in Skåne, Kronoberg, Östergötland, Västra Götaland, Dalarna and Västerbotten. The measure falls under the export strategy launched in autumn 2015 and provides support for internationalization and export. It is designed for SMEs seeking an export advice</p>
The UK	<p><b>Find a Supplier Tool</b> An online resource that provides international businesses with a searchable directory of potential UK trade partners across all sectors. The tool provides access to information on UK industries and companies. 'Find a Supplier' tool will help international businesses to find their perfect trade partner and break down barriers to trading overseas</p>

Source: own study based on the database of SBA Policy Measures.

## Summary

SMEs are crucial for the European economy, simultaneously public funds dedicated to SMEs support are limited and should, therefore, be carefully spent. The EU identified needs within the SMEs sector and planned accordingly aiming for example at supporting SMEs which do not currently export. It is not, however, empirically proven that this kind of support would result in the goal that was set. In order to efficiently and successfully support internationalization process of SMEs it is important to know what type of companies have the highest chances of succeeding on foreign markets, only then can a group of firms be defined that with some support not necessarily for internationalization *per se* stand chances to expand internationally. The outcomes of numerous research conducted in the field of international trade and internationalization, often based on European firm-level data, should be a starting point for the policy makers. In author's view all the above-mentioned measures are very likely to positively improve the condition of SMEs in a given country, but not as likely in terms of internationalization. SBA policy category 10.1 and 10.3 – the encouraging coaching of SMEs by large companies and hiring or buying in specialist expertise especially in the field of innovation should be the main area of focus. Networking initiatives should not be neglected but granted to a limited group of enterprises since in comparison to raising innovation level of companies, it is likely to be less successful in terms of internationalization, although they are consistent with the EU guidelines. A change in the gravity point of the initiatives would be advisable.

It is rather impossible to measure the influence of particular actions undertaken by the EU28 countries on the internationalization of SMEs. New Trade Theories (NNTT) put a strong emphasis on firm's productivity as an element determining company exports activity and it is confirmed by empirical findings. Therefore, concentrating on increasing SMEs productivity is very likely to enhance internationalization and as a result – positively influence the firms' and country's competitiveness. Unfortunately, many of the above presented programmes do not aim at this.

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## NARZĘDZIA WSPIERANIA INTERNACJONALIZACJI EUROPEJSKICH FIRM SEKTORA MSP – ANALIZA PORÓWNAWCZA

**Słowa kluczowe:** MSP, internacjonalizacja, wsparcie przedsiębiorstw, Small Business Act (SBA)

**Streszczenie.** Artykuł koncentruje się na przedsiębiorstwach sektora MSP Unii Europejskiej, które są potencjalnym źródłem zatrudnienia i wzrostu gospodarczego, dlatego często określane są jako „kręgosłup europejskiej gospodarki”. Celem artykułu jest krytyczne porównanie i identyfikacja trzech grup narzędzi wsparcia internacjonalizacji zadeklarowanych przez kraje członkowskie UE28 w ramach środków polityki SBA w latach 2016–2017. Grupa pierwsza składa się z pozytywnie ocenionych rozwiązań, grupa druga z potencjalnie dobrych pomysłów, ale niejasno zaplanowanych, grupa trzecia skupia rozwiązania zdaniem autora mało wydajne i z niewielkim szansami powodzenia. Analiza przeprowadzona jest w oparciu o najnowsze dostępne dane publikowane przez Komisję Europejską.

### Cytowanie

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